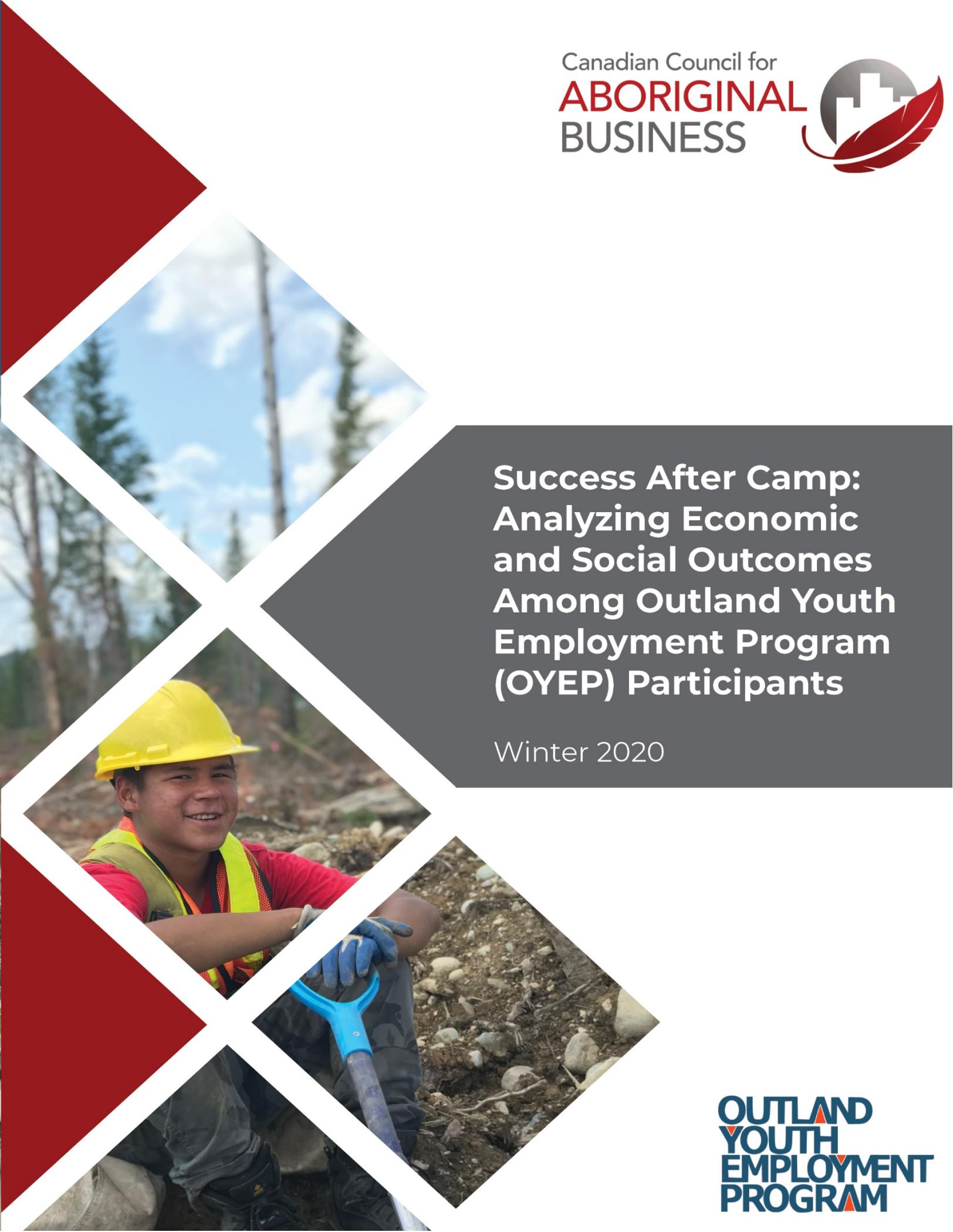




# Success After Camp: Analyzing Economic and Social Outcomes Among Outland Youth Employment Program (OYEP) Participants

Winter 2020



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# INTRODUCTION



Indigenous Peoples in Canada, governments, non-profit organizations, and employment and training providers have developed programming and policies with the intent of better preparing Indigenous youth to enter the workforce. Hundreds of initiatives in K-12 education, post-secondary education, work-based learning, and community-centered programming, have been implemented with the aim to provide Indigenous youth with the experience and tools they need to gain meaningful and sustainable employment. Although there are systematic problems in Indigenous education and training systems, many of which can be attributed to colonial policies and interventions, employment and training programs have proven useful in moving the dial towards improved employment and socio-economic outcomes among Indigenous youth.

The Outland Youth Employment Program (OYEP), which was formerly known as the First Nations Natural Resources Youth Employment Program (FNNRYEP), is a land-based education, training and work program that provides Indigenous youth with skills and experience needed to improve chances for employment success across all industries.

Indigenous youth, aged 16 to 18 years of age, are eligible to participate in the two-year program which runs from July to August of each year. The program is delivered in supportive space that replicates various natural resource sector work environments. OYEP

takes an inclusive approach to Indigenous education, recruitment and retention and provides safe and predictable learning environments that can be tailored to meet the needs of local communities and program partners.

This report analyzes labour market, economic, and social impacts for youth graduates of OYEP by comparing educational attainment, employment rates, industry of employment, and income data of a sample of OYEP participants with comparable populations in northern Ontario. In addition to the economic analysis, this paper describes the positive personal and social outcomes achieved through OYEP and describes some of the barriers that participants experience. Although we are unable to determine the causal impact of participating in the OYEP camp, by comparing participants with subsets of the population that share similar characteristics that are important determinants of labour market and educational outcomes, we find that OYEP participants are more likely to:

- **Earn Higher Annual Incomes:** On average, OYEP participants reported higher annual earnings than comparable Indigenous populations in Ontario.
- **Have Higher Select Educational Outcomes:** On average, OYEP participants had higher levels of High School and Post-Secondary Education training than comparable Indigenous populations in Ontario.
- **Be Employed:** On average, OYEP participants are much more likely to be employed than comparable Indigenous populations in Ontario, and other Indigenous individuals from the 30 Indigenous communities of which survey participants are band members.

These findings differ when compared across different age cohorts but, overall, suggest that OYEP attendance is associated with a number of positive outcomes for program participants. This report first provides an overview of OYEP, followed by a discussion of the methodological approach. The report then provides a detailed overview of key findings by select outcomes of interest. Finally, the report concludes by offering thoughts on the OYEP model relative to other employment and training programming.



## OVERVIEW OF OYEP

Incorporated in 1985, Outland began as an independent owner-operated forest renewal company focused in Ontario. Over the next 32 years, Outland would develop into one of Canada's largest suppliers of forest renewal and maintenance services with operations in 7 provinces serving government and private sector clients. The company has also grown to become a large supplier of remote workforce housing and catering services, operating in many remote locations across the country for mining, forestry, oil and gas, utilities and governments. Outland's focus in the natural resources sector gives it a strong connection to land-based work projects making it uniquely capable with people and resources to conduct a land-based youth program like OYEP.

In 2000, in partnership with 2 major Ontario forest companies and the National Aboriginal Forestry Association, the company launched the Outland Youth Employment Program (OYEP), a comprehensive and intensive natural resources training program aimed at Indigenous youth. Since 2000, OYEP has supported 590 graduates from over 103 Indigenous communities. Over its 20-year evolution OYEP has become one of the largest, most sustained Indigenous youth training and education offerings in the country.

OYEP is a 6-week live-in life-skills/work-skills employment and training experience. Steadily evolving and developing in conjunction with Indigenous community, leadership, Elder support and input, education, industry and government; OYEP focuses on the natural resource sector as a platform for learning and incorporates an immersive introduction to camp life. The program is reflective of regional and national labour market trends while

The logo for OYEP, consisting of the letters 'OYEP' in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letter 'O' is slightly larger than the others.

remaining strongly connected to the Indigenous communities that it serves.

The OYEP has three key elements:

1. Work-centered education connected to the natural resource economy and based on extensive experiential learning;
2. A safe and culturally informed camp environment that focuses on holistic support and that provides a substance-free setting;
3. The provision of generic life and work skills, with considerable emphasis on empowerment.

### **Outland describes the program as including:**

*"many social, economic and educational benefits for youth including competitive wages, relationship development, team building, increased confidence, strong work ethic, healthy habits, and experiential learning. Ultimately, we are setting the foundation for youth to have a productive and happy adult life whether on or off-reserve. We are seeing graduates contributing to their communities by participating in band leadership, administration, social services, local industry and entrepreneurship<sup>1</sup>."*

The OYEP is available to Indigenous youth, ages 16 to 18, and is offered over two years. Working throughout the summer, the six-week long program varies across the province, adapting to local jobs and economic opportunities. Participants are provided a comprehensive program, with an appropriate wage and proper learning and living environment. Participants earn \$2,900 on average in the first year and \$3,400 in the second year. The program is comprised of six sections:

- **Training:** Safety, WHMIS, First Aid, Canoe Safety
- **Forestry:** Forest Fire Fighting, GIS Training, Land Use Planning
- **Science Week:** Technology, Post-Secondary Experience
- **Energy:** Sustainability, Reliability, Efficiency
- **Mining:** Geology, Prospecting, Land Reclamation
- **Field Work:** Juvenile Spacing, Tree Planting, Maintenance

OYEP is rooted in close connections to Indigenous communities and benefits from the participation of Indigenous Elders and community leaders. OYEP is designed, in conjunction with educators, Indigenous communities and employers, to produce substantial, life-changing and sustainable benefits to participants. Program leaders, who are generally experienced Outland staff coming from Outland's field operations, support appropriate relationship development, teamwork, accomplishment, healthy living, and confidence-building. Finally, OYEP is committed to transparent and systematic evaluation of its initiatives.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.outland.ca/oyep/>

# METHODOLOGY & DATA



In order to understand the impacts of the OYEP program model, information collected from participants through an online survey and telephone interviews were analyzed and compared to outcomes of Indigenous peoples in northern Ontario. Northern Ontario was chosen as a reference group as it is 1. where OYEP participant survey respondents resided prior to beginning the program, 2. a significant area of Indigenous engagement with Outland, and 3. a key part of the company's ongoing educational and training initiatives. In order to make more accurate comparisons and begin to identify the impact of OYEP on participants, where possible and applicable, survey respondents were compared with Indigenous populations with similar demographic and geographic characteristics like age, employment, educational attainment, and place of residence. By contrast, any qualitative survey questions describing personal feelings and perceived barriers were not compared to those of Indigenous peoples in northern Ontario.

### 3.1 Survey – Sample of Participants

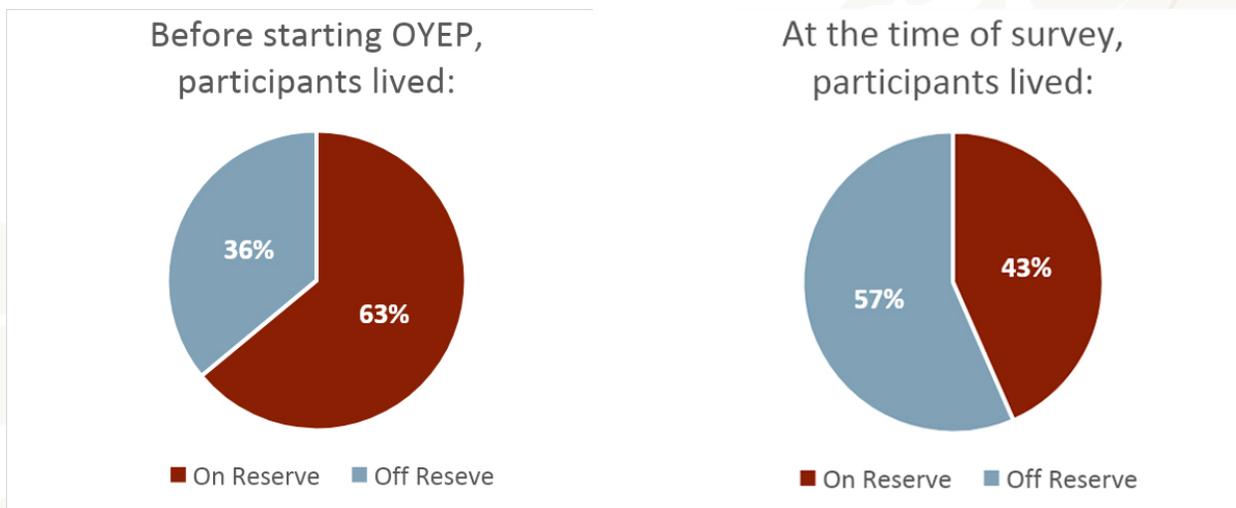
Researchers identified potential survey respondents using social media and contact information provided by Outland. Overall, 76 participants completed the online survey consisting of a number of quantitative and qualitative questions regarding their experience at the OYEP and aimed to capture education, employment, and other social outcomes after having completed the program. The sample represents 19% of the total the OYEP graduate population at the time the research was conducted. The 76 respondents were band members from 30 different First Nations in Ontario. The OYEP survey respondents were of diverse ages, had participated in the OYEP at different times, and were from different communities across Ontario, but mainly from Northern Ontario.

**Figure 1: Map of Ontario showing all First Nation communities that have had members participate in OYEP, and those that have also participated in the survey.**



Of the survey respondents, 48 (or 63%) had been living on-reserve before starting the OYEP, while 27 (or 36%) were living off-reserve<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 2). At the time of the survey, 33 (43%) lived on-reserve and 43 (57%) participants lived off-reserve in a variety of locations, primarily across Ontario.

**Figure 2: Percentage of Participants Living On and Off-Reserve Before OYEP (left). Percentage of Participants living On and Off-Reserve at Time of OYEP Survey (right).**



**Source:** OYEP Survey, CCAB Calculations

Understanding the composition of survey respondents is important for identifying appropriate comparison groups and enabling us to reasonably infer the impact of OYEP on participant success. The following section discusses the methodological approach for determining appropriate comparison groups, including controlling for survey sample characteristics important to determining the educational, employment, or labour market outcomes in order to improve the accuracy of our estimates.

<sup>2</sup> One participant's place of residence was unknown.

### 3.2 Methodology – Estimating Differences in Outcomes

There are a number of socio-demographic factors that are key determinants of the employment, economic, and social impacts of interest and may likewise be correlated with the likelihood of participating in OYEP. To attribute any differences observed between the OYEP survey respondents and the general population to having participated in the camp would require controlling for a number of factors that may be correlated with both attending the camp, and individuals' outcomes later in life. For instance, an individual's interest in natural resources makes them more likely to both attend the camp, and work in the natural resource sector, and comparing averages does not allow us to isolate the impact of the program from the individual's innate interest in that industry. Conducting an evaluation where we control for things like an individual's ability, interests, age, family socio-economic status etc. to determine the causal inference of the program's impact is beyond the scope of this project, but we are able to unpack some impacts associated with OYEP by conducting relevant comparisons.

In order to begin to understand the impacts of the OYEP, we start by:

1. Breaking out survey respondents into relevant age cohort groups.
2. For each outcome of interest, we determine the average outcomes of custom population comparison groups, in effect controlling for some socio-demographic determinants of interest (i.e., age, place of residence, and Indigenous identity) yielding a more accurate understanding of the program's associated impacts.
3. Finally, we compare outcomes between a relevant cohorts of survey respondents and average outcomes of the comparison groups and assume that any differences observed can be attributed to participating in OYEP.

Each of these steps are, in turn, discussed in further detail.

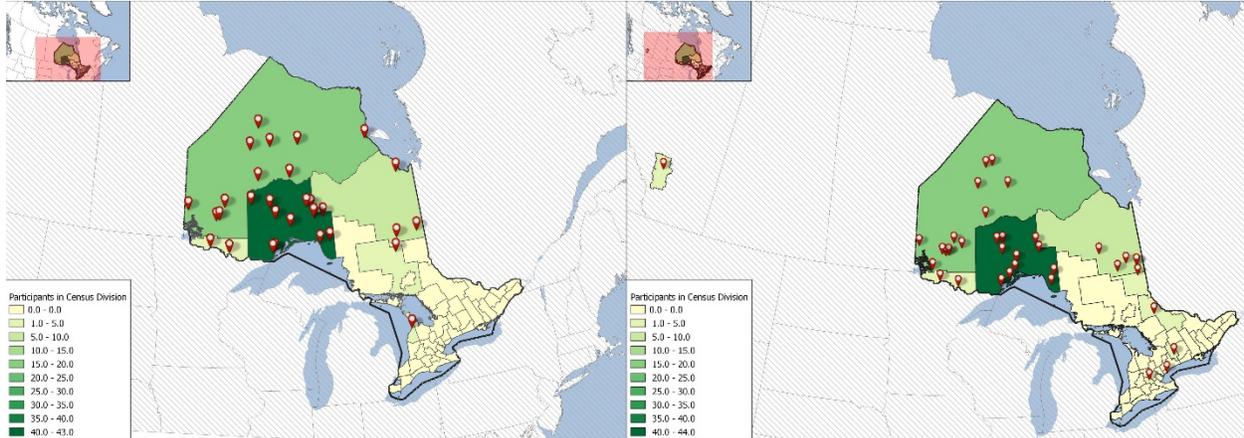
Given survey data was collected from participants that had attended OYEP over the 19 years in which OYEP has been in operations, it was important to determine a methodology for comparing participants to peer groups who would have comparable employment, life, labour market, and economic conditions shaping their outcomes. As such, survey respondents were divided into three cohorts. The first cohort consisted of those who graduated from 2013 to 2018, the second cohort of those who graduated between 2008 and 2012, and the third cohort of participants who graduated in and before 2007. Cohort level comparisons were made wherever possible, and subject to the availability of census data for relevant age categories.

In order to determine appropriate comparison populations, between individual cohorts and similarly aged Indigenous people in northern Ontario, self-reported earnings and educational outcomes of survey respondents were compared to those from similar socio-demographic groups (e.g. place of residence, employment status, and Aboriginal identity) reported in Census 2016 data.

Figure 3 shows the Census Divisions (CD) of residence for OYEP survey respondents during childhood and at the time of survey. Note that most participants were located in communities in northern Ontario upon entering the program.

Respondents' community of origin<sup>3</sup> in Ontario were used for the comparative analysis, namely, the following six<sup>4</sup> Census Divisions: Timmins, Kenora, Thunder Bay, Greater Sudbury, Bruce County, and Cochrane.

**Figure 3: Residence During Childhood (left) and at the Time of Survey (right)**



**Source:** OYEP Survey, CCAB Calculations

**Survey Questions:** 1) What City, Town or First Nations Community were you raised in? 2) What City, Town or First Nations Community do you currently reside in?

All CD level comparisons were with individuals who identified as Aboriginal (Indigenous peoples) as defined by Statistics Canada<sup>5</sup>. The educational and labour market outcomes of these six census divisions were combined in order to compare with the survey outcomes. Furthermore, in order to ensure comparability with census data, only survey questions that were asked using the same structure and answer choices as the 2016 Census were selected for comparison. Importantly, this approach requires the assumption that any difference between the survey respondents and comparison populations can be attributed to camp participation.

<sup>3</sup> Survey question: What City, Town or First Nations Community were you raised in?

<sup>4</sup> Although some respondents lived in the northern Ontario Census Division of Rainy River, it was not included in the comparison given that a number of data points were suppressed due to insufficient counts at the CD level, and the CD had markedly different population characteristics than the other six census divisions included.

<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal identity includes persons who are First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit) and/or those who are Registered or Treaty Indians (that is, registered under the Indian Act of Canada) and/or those who have membership in a First Nation or Indian band. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are defined in the Constitution Act, 1982, section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

# RESEARCH FINDINGS



To determine the impact of OYEP, select education, income, and labour market outcomes of OYEP survey respondents were compared with outcomes of comparable Indigenous population living in the CDs from which participants originated. Overall, we find that there are favourable outcomes for OYEP participants relative to the Indigenous population in relevant CDs. Our results vary depending on the age cohort, but we find that OYEP participants report higher income levels, have significantly higher levels of educational attainment, and improved employment outcomes. Additionally, OYEP participants are more likely to be employed in the natural resource sector - in particular, the Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting industries - than other industries relative to the comparison population. Section 4 presents more detailed comparisons for each of the outlined findings.

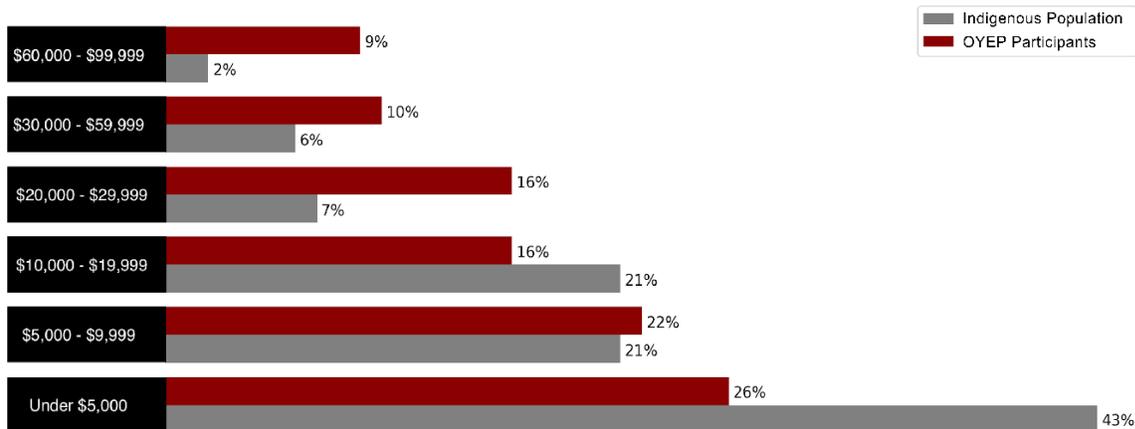
## 4.1 Income

To compare incomes of OYEP participants with populations of Indigenous people in relevant CDs, we split respondents into relevant age cohorts, and compare the salary of employed respondents<sup>6</sup> to similar aged populations in six northern Ontario CDs. Figure 4 shows the salary distribution for respondents ages 15 to 24.

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<sup>6</sup> Excludes both respondents currently in school, and those that indicated they are not working in their survey responses.

**Figure 4: Annual Income from Employment for OYEP Participants and Comparable Indigenous populations, Ages 15-24**



**Source:** OYEP Survey, Statistics Canada 2016 Census of the Population

**Note:** Salary ranges for OYEP participants were compared to the employment income of similarly aged Indigenous people in relevant northern Ontario CDs obtained from the 2016 Census of Population. Respondents that selected 'not applicable' as a response were not considered. Salary ranges are compared with employment income groups in 2015 for population aged 15-24 years and 25-34 years in private households that report Aboriginal identity. Only employed survey respondents are considered.

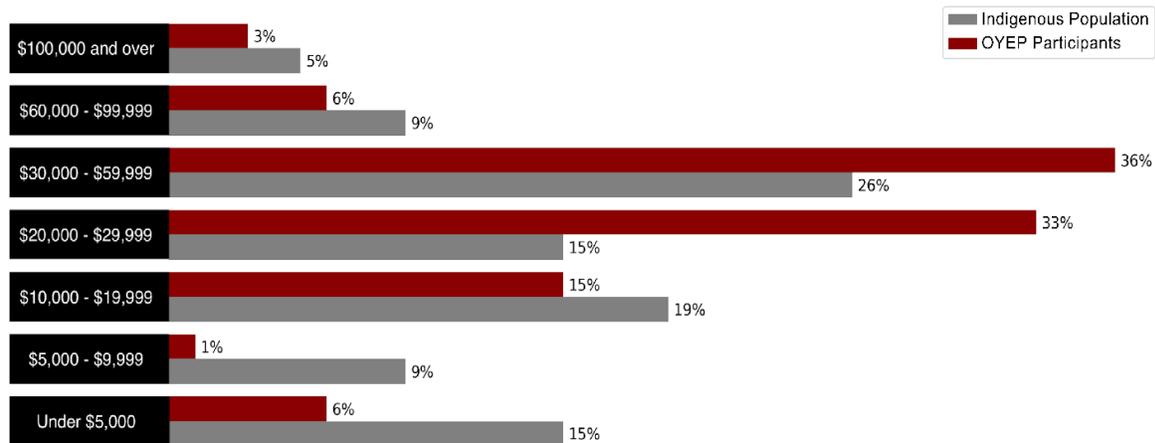
**Survey Question:** What is your current salary range?

In general, OYEP participants report higher salaries than Indigenous people of the same age and place of residence throughout the income distribution. We observe that at the lowest income threshold (under \$5,000), only 26% of OYEP participants earn \$5,000 or less compared to 43% of comparable Indigenous people generally. Furthermore, nearly 20% of OYEP participants earn over \$30,000, whereas only 8% of the Indigenous population are in this income bracket. This difference between survey participants and comparable populations suggests that OYEP is enabling higher income employment opportunities for program participants relative to the Indigenous population from similar geographies.

Figure 5 presents the salary range for OYEP participants and the Indigenous population from the same CDs ages 25 to 34. In general, we again see that OYEP participants report higher income levels than comparable populations with the exception of small differences at the highest income brackets<sup>7</sup>. At the lowest income levels, just 7% of participants reported earning less than \$10,000 compared to 24% of the comparable Indigenous population. In the middle-income brackets, 69% of OYEP participants reported earning between \$20,000-\$59,999, compared to just 41% of the comparable population. This again suggests that OYEP participants are earning higher wages than comparable populations in northern Ontario.

<sup>7</sup> Note, these differences are likely driven by small sample size.

**Figure 5: Annual Income from Employment for OYEP Participants and Comparable Indigenous populations, Ages 25-34**



**Source:** OYEP Survey, Statistics Canada 2016 Census of the Population

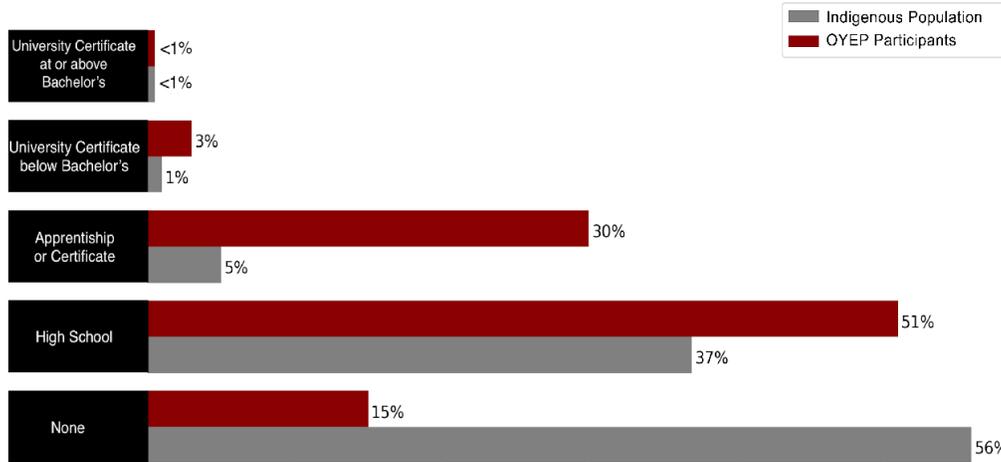
**Note:** Salary ranges for OYEP participants were compared to the employment income of similarly aged Indigenous peoples in relevant northern Ontario CDs obtained from the 2016 Census of Population. Respondents that selected 'not applicable' as a response were not considered. Salary ranges are compared with Employment income groups in 2015 for population aged 15-24 years and 25-34 years in private households that report Aboriginal identity. Only employed survey respondents are considered.

**Survey Question:** What is your current salary range?

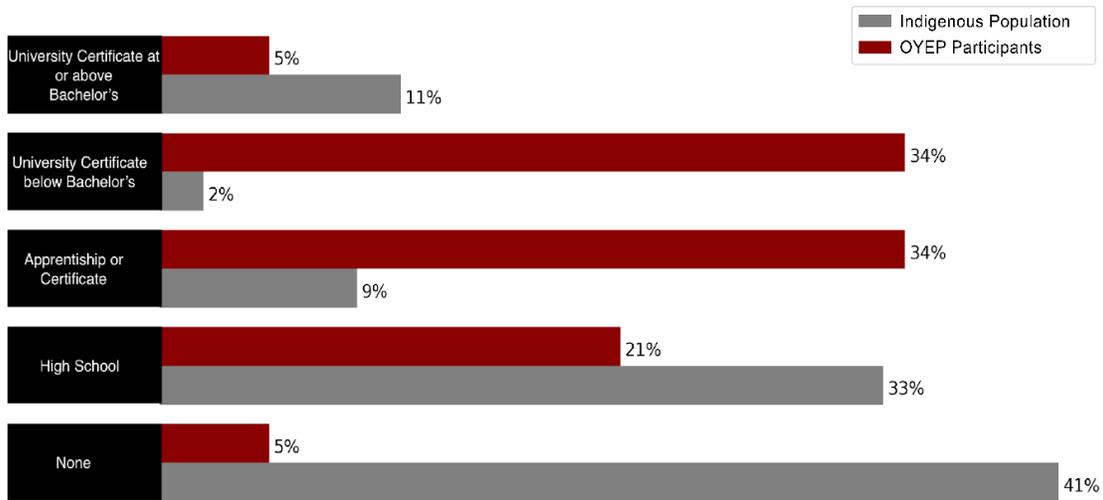
## 4.2 Education

To determine the educational outcomes of OYEP participants, survey responses for two age cohorts were compared with the Indigenous population of the same age range in six relevant CDs. Figures 6 and 7 show the educational attainment of OYEP participants relative to relevant age groups for two age cohorts.

**Figure 6: OYEP and Indigenous Population Educational Attainment, Ages 15-24**



**Figure 7: OYEP and Indigenous Population Educational Attainment, Ages 25-34**



**Source:** OYEP Survey, Statistics Canada 2016 Census of the Population.

**Note:** Survey respondents currently enrolled in high school with no other educational attainment set to 'none'.

**Survey question:** What is your highest level of education?

The education categories represent the highest level of education achieved. This does not reflect whether or not someone is currently enrolled in school. The definitions of the education categories are as follows:

- **None:** They have not completed high school but they may have completed elementary school
- **High school:** They have completed high school or an equivalency program.
- **Apprenticeship or Certificate:** Includes any type of certification, apprenticeship, qualification, journey person's designation, trade certificates or diplomas, completed at community colleges, institutes of technology, vocational centres and similar institutions.
- **University Certificate below Bachelor's:** Includes college diplomas/degrees.
- **University Certificate at or above Bachelor's:** Includes the categories Bachelor's degree, post-grad certificates or diplomas, Master's degrees, degrees in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and PhD degrees.

Comparing OYEP participants aged 15-24 with similarly aged Indigenous people in relevant geographic regions indicates that OYEP has a positive impact on educational attainment. OYEP participants are more likely than a comparable Indigenous population to have finished high school, received an apprenticeship or certificate, or obtained a University Certificate below a Bachelor's Degree. In Figure 6, we see that OYEP graduates are more likely to continue their education past high school than the comparable Indigenous population. Of the OYEP graduates in this younger cohort, only 66% of OYEP participants attained High School accreditation or below, relative to 93% in the Indigenous population. This clearly shows that OYEP strongly encourages participants to finish high school.

Similar to the younger cohort, OYEP participants aged 25-34 likewise experienced improved educational outcomes, in particular in the completion of Apprenticeships or Certificates and University Certificates below the Bachelor Level, with over half (68%) of participants in this age cohort attaining either of these degree types, compared to 11% in a comparable Indigenous population. Roughly 39% of OYEP participants completed some form of university education, relative to only 13% in a comparable Indigenous population. Only 26% of OYEP participants have "High School accreditation or below" as their highest education, relative to 74% in a comparable Indigenous population. Completing high school and continuing education is a barrier for Indigenous people in the north, but this statistic shows that OYEP strongly encourages its participants to advance their education.

The strong high school graduation rate for OYEP participants can be attributed to the opportunities to earn high school credits during camp. OYEP, in partnership with the Long Lake 58 Education Authority, has been offering two Cooperative High School Credits for full participation in all designated curriculum components of program for the past 10 years. This program improvement has been an important contributor to participant educational attainment.

Even though OYEP is focused on skills and trades in the natural resources & service industries, it empowers participants to continue their education in any field where their interests might lie. This is because beyond the tangible certifications and natural resources-specific skills, the program builds off a strong sense of accomplishment instilling a sense of pride, confidence leadership, and hope in the teenage participants. This is elaborated on in the last section.

**From this sample, graduates pursued or are currently pursuing higher education in a variety of backgrounds:**

- Business management and marketing (6),
- Natural resources and conservation (5),
- College/university preparatory programs (4),
- Mechanic and repair technologies/technicians (4),
- Security and protective services (3),
- Education (3),
- Public administration and social service professions (3),
- Construction trades (2),
- Health professions and related programs (2),
- Liberal arts and sciences (2),
- Culinary services (2),
- Human services (1),
- Dental programs (1), and
- Engineering technologies and engineering-related fields (1).

**Excluding those respondents who are currently enrolled in or have only completed high school, the reasons for choosing the post-secondary programs were due to:**

- personal or employment interest (71%),
- friends and family influence (26%),
- already having experience in the field (22%),
- local jobs available in the field (20%), other (20%)

Attending the OYEP program clearly motivates participants to upgrade their job skills or education in the next 5 years. Across all cohorts, 94% said they plan on continuing their studies. Of participants who have graduated from OYEP in the last five years, all said they plan to upgrade their skills or education. The reasons for planning to upgrade their education was for career advancements (50%), a desire for change in career or industry (32%), an opportunity to earn more money (13%), and other unidentified reasons (4%).

These results suggest the OYEP had significant impacts on educational attainment for both cohort groups. Although there were differences observed in the likelihood of completing specific degree types across age cohorts, these may have been driven by labour market and broader socio-economic trends influencing individual labour market choices - for instance, demand for workers in the natural resource sector - rather than reflective of differing impacts of the camp itself over time for different cohorts.

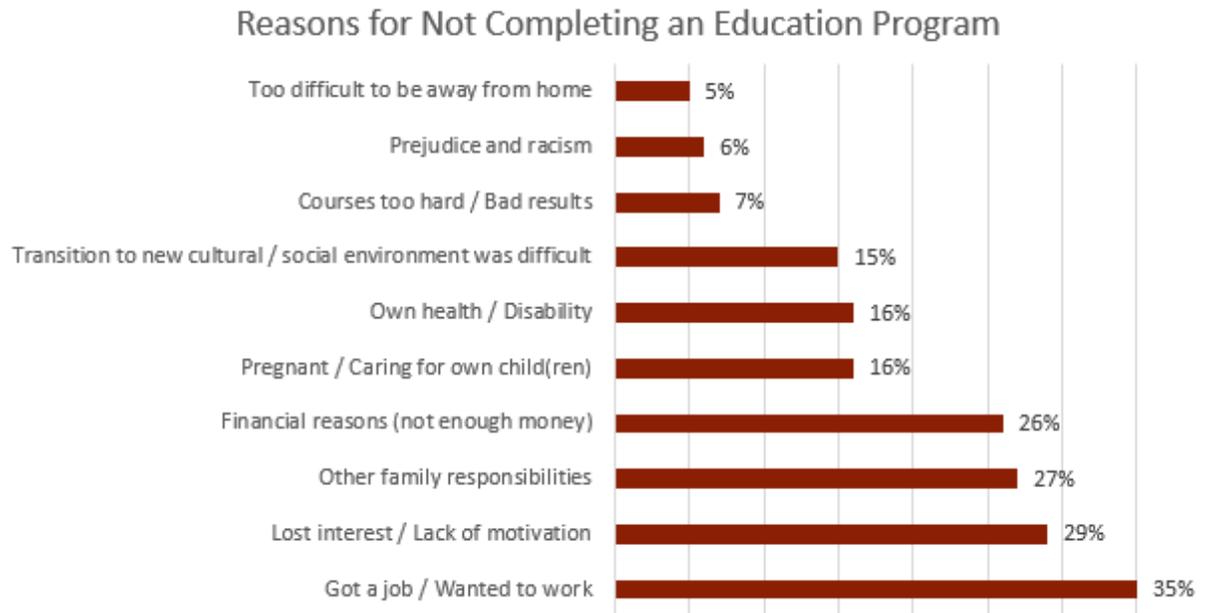
***Barriers to Education***

Although in general, OYEP participants are more educated than their Indigenous counterparts, they still experience some challenges to completing or continuing their education. OYEP participants face a variety of barriers to advanced education, ranging from finances to a lack of understanding of post-secondary options. For careers in Natural Resources and other related fields, a bachelor's degree or higher may not be required unless one is trying to work in management or executive levels.

OYEP students who started an educational program but did not finish (n=43) were asked to indicate their highest level of education attempted and to indicate why they were unable to complete the program. Of that sub-group, 66% attempted college but did not finish. Almost one-third (31%) attempted a certificate/training/apprenticeship program but did not

complete their studies. Only 8% of participants attempted to finish their bachelor’s degree; 5% attempted but did not finish their high school degree.

**Figure 8: OYEP participations reported reasons for not completing an education program**



**Source:** OYEP Survey.

**Survey question:** If you started school but didn’t finish, please indicate the reasons you did not finish the program. Check all that apply.

The experience of the OYEP participants – who are relatively more informed and motivated being beneficiaries of an intensive and well-developed program – is highly illustrative of the challenges facing Indigenous youth. Importantly, a significant number of the participants (35%) suggest that getting a job or seeking a job was a reason for not pursuing their education to a higher level. This demonstrates that OYEP participants are empowered to make educational or professional decisions, as they see fit. Not all of the ‘barriers to education’ are necessarily problematic. However, if a participant wanted to finish school but was unable to due to other circumstances, then more support is needed to provide Indigenous youth with more options to reach their education goals.

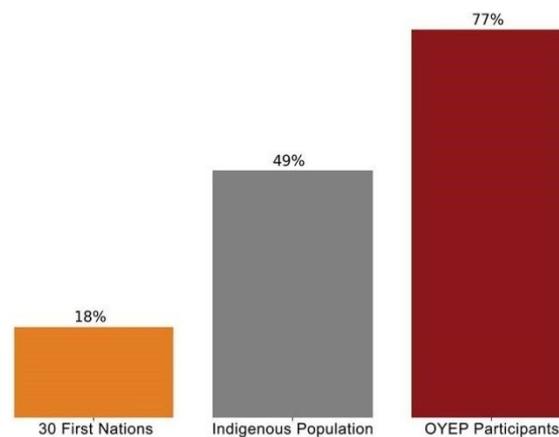
Outland is time-limited and only has the capacity to support the Indigenous youth until the end of their program. The barriers identified by OYEP participants show that there needs to be support systems for those who wish to continue their education, often away from their homes, with family left behind, in new unfamiliar places. Financial assistance, health care, daycare, mentoring, and cultural support would support Indigenous people who want to continue their education past high school. Unfortunately, the socially constructed barriers such as the challenge of transitioning to a new environment, being away from home and experiencing prejudice and racism (together 26%) still convince many Indigenous learners to drop out of school.

### 4.3 Employment Rates

Figure 9 shows the employment rate for comparable Indigenous populations from six relevant CDs, the average employment rate of the general population living on-reserve from the 30 First Nations of which OYEP survey respondents are members, and the OYEP participants.

OYEP participants reported an employment rate nearly 30 percentage points higher than that across the Indigenous population of the six CDs, and over 50 percentage points higher employment rate than that of the 30 First Nations from which the OYEP participants are members. Although this result is striking, it is important to note that comparing between band-level on-reserve and off-reserve outcomes should be interpreted with caution for two reasons. First, there are many instances where only one band member attended the camp. This small sample size likely overstates employment rates in particular small communities when calculating the average across the 30 First Nations. Second, many respondents were band members, but did not live on-reserve, so a more appropriate comparison would include only band members living off-reserve. The 2016 Census is unable to support this type of comparison. The effect of this limitation is that the difference between OYEP participants the 30 First Nations from which participants are members could overstate the impact of the OYEP program because there are generally fewer employment opportunities available on-reserve. Nevertheless, the statistic strongly indicates that OYEP participants are more likely to be employed than their Indigenous counterparts, and the employment rate in their home communities is significantly lower than in rural and urban communities in the same region.

**Figure 9: Employment Rate for OYEP Participants, Comparable Indigenous Populations from Relevant Census Divisions, and On-Reserve First Nations Populations**



**Source:** OYEP Survey, Statistics Canada 2016 Census of the Population

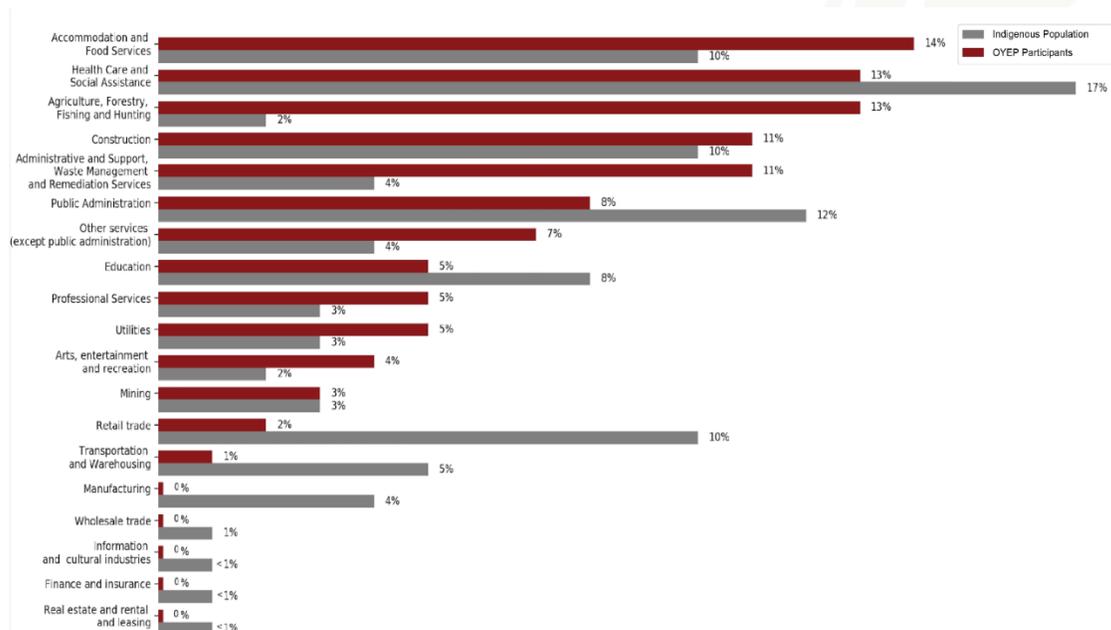
**Note:** Comparisons are made between OYEP respondents, excluding individuals currently enrolled in school, with Indigenous people in 5 CDs, and with the average employment rate of the general population in the 30 First Nations of which respondents are members.

**Survey Question:** Are you currently employed?

#### 4.4 Industry/Sector of Employment

Participants who reported that they are currently working were asked to provide their job position or title which were matched to standard employment categories (NAICS codes). Similar to the education statistics, the participants work across almost all industries:

**Figure 10: Current Occupations of OYEP Participants, Comparable Indigenous Populations from Relevant Census Divisions.**



**Source:** OYEP Survey, Statistics Canada 2016 Census of the Population

**Note:** Comparisons are made between OYEP respondents, excluding individuals currently enrolled in school, and the industry of employment rate for comparable Indigenous populations from six relevant CDs.

**Survey Question:** What is your current job title or occupation?

The participants were asked to identify all the types of jobs they've had in the two broad sectors: "office/administration" and "trades/technical". The results in table 1 show that few OYEP graduates get to the executive level in either sectors. However, they are more likely to be in a management position in the office/administration fields (18%) than trades/technical work (5%). This suggests that OYEP helps students with the 'first step' and getting their life on track but there are still barriers to Indigenous people working in senior-level positions. More research is needed to understand why OYEP participants have difficulty obtaining roles in senior-level positions.

**Table 1. Percentage breakdown of the types of jobs OYEP participants have had.**

Type of Job	In Office/ Administration	In Trades/ Technical
<b>Entry-level</b>	50%	55%
<b>Management</b>	18%	5%
<b>Casual Employment</b>	55%	37%
<b>Seasonal Employment</b>	36%	33%
<b>Executive</b>	4%	0%
<b>Self-employment</b>	10%	5%
<b>Other (please specify)</b>	0%	2%

**Those who are unemployed (n=20) were asked why they were not working. They reported as follows:**

- Their work is seasonal (31%);
- They are a student (24%);
- They need to take care of their family (22%);
- They were recently laid off (13%), or
- Their parents or spouse financially support the household (2%).

In assessing the impact of OYEP on their preparation for the workforce, 100% of those surveyed said that they either “strongly agree” or “agree” that OYEP provided tools for employment that they would not have been able to access otherwise. A vast majority (91%) of those surveyed said that they either “strongly agree” or “agree” that OYEP provided employment opportunities that they would not have been able to access otherwise. An equally large number (96%) of those surveyed said that they either “strongly agree” or “agree” that OYEP provided tools and resources that were valuable to them in building their employment or career path. One participant said that she “wouldn’t currently be employed if it wasn’t for [Outland]”. Another participant said that he “owes a lot to this program” and that his current career goals came from his experience at OYEP.

#### 4.5 Personal Development

The overarching goal of the OYEP is to put Indigenous youth on a positive path in their education and career which leads to a heavy emphasis on personal development and empowerment throughout the summer camp experience. OYEP participants also believed that this aspect of OYEP was very valuable to them. Almost all (95%) of those surveyed said that they either “strongly agree” or “agree” that OYEP provided tools for life that they would not have been able to secure otherwise. Participants learned skills and obtained certificates related to the Natural Resources industry, but they also reported gaining “soft skills” such as teamwork (97%), practical life skills (87%), time management (86%), leadership (81%), which are transferable to all other types of careers. All of the participants said that they either “strongly agree” or “agree” that OYEP provided the opportunity for personal development and either “strongly agree” or “agree” that OYEP is a valuable program. Significantly, 97% of those surveyed said that their OYEP experience helped put them on a positive path in life that they may not have found had they not participated.

Clearly there is a strong relationship between the OYEP experience and personal development for Indigenous youth which is attributed to the program organizer's attentive care and support for each participant. The three youth who participated in the "in-depth interviews" all had similar feelings regarding their futures before and after the program. They said that before attending OYEP, they felt 'not at all' or 'not very hopeful' about their future employment and career. After completing the program, their spirits changed to feeling 'very hopeful' about what the future had in store. Since OYEP recruits youth from over 50 First Nations across Ontario, the participants mentioned that meeting other Indigenous teenagers in similar situations who they may have never had the opportunity to meet was very special. There is a sense of unity and connection amongst participants that can uplift Indigenous youth knowing that they are not alone in the transition to adulthood while facing these barriers. As mentioned in the Indspire report, OYEP "creates an inter-supportive community that emotionally supports every individual as they need to be supported"<sup>8</sup>. OYEP definitely offers intangible benefits such as confidence, pride, and hope during pivotal teenage years. The emotional support from the program leaders and participants cannot be stressed enough as a key element to the success of OYEP.

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<sup>8</sup> Dr. John A. Hodson & Nadine Hedican, *The Outland Youth Employment Program: A Narrative Study* (Thunder Bay: Maamaawisiwin Education Research Centre, 2019), 1-41.



# CONCLUSION

OYEP is one of a wide range of employment and training programs offered to Indigenous Peoples in Ontario. In reviewing outcomes of OYEP participants, it is clear that the program is associated with a number of positive economic, labour market, educational, and social outcomes.

Primarily funded by the government of Ontario with program support from Government of Canada since its inception in 2000, OYEP in recent years has grown into a multi-province initiative requiring a stronger understanding and engagement with the larger fabric of employment and training offerings across Canada. The Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ISETS), formerly the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, is the largest Government of Canada employment and training program for Indigenous peoples, but has known challenges in the identification of mandate, program delivery, monitoring of employment outcomes and overall program evaluation. In 2019, the Auditor

General of Canada produced a report on ISETs, noting:

*"We concluded that Employment and Social Development Canada's management of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy and the Skills and Partnership Fund was not sufficient to demonstrate that these programs increased the number of Indigenous people getting jobs and staying employed."*

Understanding the impacts, successes, and associated costs of employment and training programs is an important step to understanding how best to address the needs of underemployed Indigenous peoples, as well as what resources are required to support Indigenous youth in the labour market. The Government of Canada has indicated that it is determined to expand opportunities and improve outcomes for Indigenous peoples. There is a growing employer interest in hiring and retaining Indigenous staff. Indigenous youth are eager to learn, to train and to work. But a burning and serious question remains: "What works?"

Despite the fact that, overall, employment in the natural resource sector in Ontario has been lagging for the past eight years<sup>9</sup>, the OYEP model has continued to produce positive social and employment outcomes for Indigenous communities across Northern Ontario. The OYEP model works closely with communities to build relevant curriculum in a supportive learning environment. By providing a diverse and wide-ranging skill set throughout the summer months, Indigenous youth graduates of OYEP report higher income levels, higher educational attainment, and are more likely to be employed.

While OYEP participants learned skills and obtained certificates related to the natural resources sector, graduates were also provided the opportunity to gain "soft", job-related skills that were not sector specific. Significantly, 100% of OYEP graduates surveyed reported that they either "strongly agree" or "agree" that OYEP provided tools for employment that they would not have been able to access otherwise. In addition, 97% of those surveyed said that their OYEP experience helped put them on a positive path in life that they may not have found had they not participated; further demonstrating the strong impact of the program on employment and social outcomes for Indigenous youth in Northern Ontario. From these findings, it is evident that OYEP is associated with successful education, income, employment, and social outcomes for participants, and may serve as a useful model to learn from for other employment and training programs in Canada.

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<sup>9</sup> Industry data reported by Statistics Canada in *Provincial and Territorial Natural Resource Indicators, 2009 to 2016* demonstrates a steady decline of employment in the natural resource sector in Ontario, from 141,000 jobs in 2011 to 134,000 in 2016.

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